



LETHBRIDGE CHAMBER *of* COMMERCE

THE VOICE OF BUSINESS IN LETHBRIDGE SINCE 1889

Mayor Spearman and City Council
City of Lethbridge
910 – 4th Avenue South
Lethbridge, AB
T1J 0P6

April 28, 2016

Dear Mayor Spearman and City Council,

The Lethbridge Chamber of Commerce would like to thank you for permitting our organization to present the key issues and events which have consumed our attention over the past half-year. We are also grateful to you for listening so attentively to the specific issues we raised regarding the need for vision and careful planning in your CIP deliberations, in order to produce the greatest economic impact for the city, and for taking to heart our long-standing call for government to not compete with private enterprise unless all possible avenues to engage with private business have first been fully explored. It is our sincere hope that our carefully thought-out recommendations provide you with ample fodder for the kinds of constructive dialogues which need to happen in advance of the momentous decisions which you will be facing in May.

Please forgive us in advance for the length of this letter, but the unified Board of Directors of the Lethbridge Chamber of Commerce feels a strong sense of civic responsibility to advocate for our position that key CIP decisions need to be made with careful and deliberate thought to the long-term economic impacts of the projects, and their impact on future projects, and that now is the time for careful study and reflection before dollars are committed and projects approved which will set the direction of our community and restrict future choices and developments.

We are specifically referring to our recommendation that City Council should consider the development of a multi-use Convention Centre, with an integrated Performing Arts Theatre, Art Gallery, and Convention Space, as a high priority. We were surprised at the incredible response from the community that we received upon releasing this recommendation and we continue to believe strongly that our recommendation should remain foremost in the minds of City Council as you move towards final deliberations. The following points have been prepared to provide you with additional information on this recommendation for your reflection.

1. There are important questions that need to be asked before our City invests.

Our policy arose out of a growing realization at our Board table, that although the various parties who have presented large capital projects to the City have conducted studies supporting their plans and the benefits of their projects, we are under the impression that no one group had yet asked the question:



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Given that there is limited CIP funding, what combination or prioritization of projects would provide the most long-term economic benefit to our region?

Or the question:

Isn't there any way some of these projects can be combined in order to minimize costs while maximizing economic return to the community and increasing those facilities' operational competitiveness in the national and international markets?

Or the question:

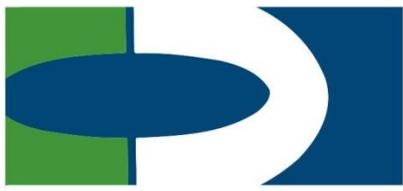
Could a partnership with the University of Lethbridge be struck to bring their world-class art collection out into the community, and could that project be combined with proposed facilities to further maximize economic return and competitiveness as a genuine legacy project?

It was in the shadow of these questions that the Chamber of Commerce developed our recommendation by looking at how other cities around the world have approached similar problems.

2. Each of the projects brings benefits, but we cannot afford them all independently of each other.

The Board of the Chamber of Commerce is united on the following points:

- a. That a Trades and Exhibition Space to replace or upgrade aging facilities at Exhibition Park should be a community priority in light of the economic and social benefits that would accrue to our city from such a project.
- b. That a Convention Space should be a community priority in light of the economic and social benefits that would accrue to our city from such a project.
- c. That a new Performing Arts Space should be a community priority in light of the economic and social benefits that would accrue to our city from such a project.
- d. That there is a unique opportunity in Lethbridge presented by the University of Lethbridge's art collection, which has the potential to be a major national and international attraction for Southern Alberta.
- e. That **there is not sufficient capital** available to realize each of these projects independently within an acceptable time frame and that economic opportunities will be missed by extended delays in their realization.



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- f. That at this crossroads in the life of our community we have a chance to make wise and careful decisions regarding these capital projects which will have an immense impact on the future of our city.
- g. That the combination of some of these projects into a multi-use facility (such as the one we have proposed) presents a possible way forward that could achieve the realization of as many of these beneficial projects in the shortest space of time, and would be far more cost-efficient than pursuing each project in isolation.
- h. Finally, that how you locate these facilities matters. The location of large capital projects like these is the chief factor which determines the extent and kind of economic impacts that accrue to benefit the community.

3. Decisions made today will shape our community for decades. Opportunities will be won or lost, and there is no need to rush.

The Chamber of Commerce did not rush into the decision to advocate for this policy. We do not wish nor intend to upset the plans of others. It is our hope and intention that our recommendation will spark a necessary conversation between stakeholders to collaborate and develop a vision for this city at the crossroads at which find ourselves. The Chamber would value being a participant in such a conversation, but it is our sincere wish that the City of Lethbridge would be willing to fulfill their natural role and guide the community towards a vision that produces the most good for the most number of residents and produces the greatest economic impact for the city.

The decisions we make today will shape, limit, or guide the decisions of tomorrow, and we have the opportunity now to make wise choices for the long-term future of this city. For example, the inclusion of a specifically purposed Convention space combined with an Exhibition space will likely remove the option of any future Convention space attached to other facilities or located elsewhere for the foreseeable future. The Chamber is fully supportive of such a combination of facilities ***if and only if*** it is demonstrably the best option and location which will drive the most long term economic returns for our region. This cannot be established without specific study of the questions we have posed.

In the Chamber's opinion, an ideal outcome from our recommendation could be a short postponement of some CIP decisions in order to strike a steering committee to ask that question: "*what combination or prioritization of projects would provide the most economic return to the city?*", and to commission a study by Economic Development Lethbridge into the science behind the same.

In conclusion, the Chamber of Commerce hopes that City Council considers our recommendation as a call to lead our City towards the realization of a wonderful legacy of carefully-considered public investments. We have this moment and this chance now to take time to reflect, to ask more questions, and to move forward again with confidence in a direction which will make future generations proud.



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The Lethbridge Chamber of Commerce welcomes the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the above, should you have any questions with regards to our position on this issue.

Sincerely,

Mr. Harry Gross, CGA, CA, CPA
President and Chair of the Board
Lethbridge Chamber of Commerce

cc.

Lethbridge City Council
Mr. Garth Sherwin, City Manager, City of Lethbridge
Exhibition Park
Allied Arts Council
The University of Lethbridge
Economic Development Lethbridge
Local Media Partners

Enclosure:

Development of a Multi-Use Convention and Arts Centre